Dear Friends,

This past year marked a threshold in the life of Westminster. We saw the completion of a six-year effort to reimagine the church facility and create new ministry opportunities.

*Open Doors Open Futures* invited us to reconsider what it means to be a community of faith in downtown Minneapolis. We dedicated the new wing with a rousing worship service. PCUSA Stated Clerk J. Herbert Nelson preached, challenging us not to be content with merely a beautiful building but to use it to work for God’s justice in the city.

After coffee hour in the parking garage, we headed up to Westminster Hall to hear the choir sing a newly commissioned work. It was an amazing day.

We moved into the new space a week later, just in time for Westminster to host the Super Bowl of Hope in cooperation with Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness. With this first big public event in our new wing we were off and running!

As we moved through those first weeks, we began to refer to 2018 as the *Year of Learning*. We learned to collaborate with the Harmon Center of St. David’s Center for Children and Family Development. We launched the Magnet Senior Center. We started two new worship services. We began hosting a wide assortment of community events. We had a lot to discover; it was a thrilling year!

As we pivot into 2019, we are shifting toward a new focus: the *Year of Invitation*. Every ministry area will consider how to plan its programs in an outward-looking way. There are thousands of downtown residents to invite into the life and ministry of Westminster. We are called to reach out and, in the words of Jesus, invite them to *come and see*.

Westminster is transforming its Telling Presence in the City by throwing open its doors to the world around us in new ways. All who enter will change us and help make our congregation stronger for generations to come.

I am grateful for all my wonderful colleagues, but this year I give particular thanks to God for Dr. Melanie Ohnstad for her nearly quarter-century of music ministry at Westminster. Her role among us comes to a conclusion at the end of May and will we miss her dearly.

And deep thanks to all who make Westminster a lively, thriving congregation.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Dr. Tim Hart-Andersen
WE BOLDLY STEPPED FORWARD INTO A NEW FUTURE.

Last year, after nearly six years of preparation, we saw the promises of *Open Doors Open Futures* begin to take shape:

To serve as a spiritual center for the city

- We launched two new worship services, *Gathered at Five* and *The Clearing*, opening our doors to new people who seek more non-traditional ways to worship.
- More than 250 people gathered at Westminster to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Thin Places*.
- Our new contemplative prayer service every Wednesday at noon is drawing downtown residents and workers alike.
To engage young people

- Our young people are having a ball in space that reflects their developmental needs and are growing their engagement within and beyond the walls of the church.

- We prepared for the 30th anniversary celebration of the Meisel Scholar Program, which has awarded nearly $200,000 to 70 young people to allow them opportunities to develop their faith and vocation.

To more deeply engage the community

- Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey kicked off our first major community event in the new building. Bold Hope in the North drew hundreds of people and NFL stars to a benefit for Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness.

- Our space came to life as a tool for Hospitality Ministry; more than 16,000 visitors were welcomed to galas, receptions, weddings, and musical performances.

- Westminster joined forces with Minneapolis Central Library to launch The Magnet Senior Center, a place for older adults to gather for coffee, conversation, and cultural and educational events.

- Our extraordinary Windows Into Palestine festival drew people from all over the region to Westminster to revel in the food, art, and culture of our friends in Palestine.

- We parked 78,878 cars, more than 1,500 per week!

To use the best sustainable building practices

- Westminster claimed the top spot in the “Small Green Space” and “Public Realm Improvement” categories in the Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District’s annual Greening & Public Realm Awards, decided through public vote.

To expand our mission

- St. David’s Harman Center for Child and Family Wellbeing is now at home on the second floor of Westminster’s new wing and is serving children who have faced significant adversity and trauma and who are in or at risk of out-of-home placement.

- A week-long series of events showcased our global partnerships in Cuba, Cameroon, and Palestine.

- We celebrated the groundbreaking of Great River Landing, the Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative project for adults who have been incarcerated, homeless, or unemployed.
We glorified God through worship, music & art.

We launched two new weekly services—The Clearing on Wednesdays and Gathered at Five on Sunday evenings, adding a music team for the latter.

Musical highlights of 2018 included a joint performance of Westminster’s and Plymouth Congregational Church’s youth choirs and a moving Christmas Eve Pageant featuring the Westminster Abbies, The Psalmists, youth brass players, and original choreography and dancing.

"Gathered at Five has taken our worship into new spaces and challenged our idea of what worship can and should be. We are pushing new boundaries with art, music, light and darkness, welcome and inclusivity, and responding faithfully to the dramatic injustices in our nation and world."

— Rev. Sarah Brouwer

"Worship at The Clearing is a satisfying breath amid busy schedules and turbulent times. Like the brief respite of open skies and lakeshore following an arduous Boundary Waters portage, the work is not done, but we pause to reflect and recharge before the journey continues."

— Jeff Gram
Dr. Rodney Allen Schwartz curated outstanding exhibitions of art throughout the many new and existing spaces in the building, including the Corner Gallery, Garden Room, Westminster Commons, Meisel Room, and Heller Commons. These new galleries allow for more biblical and social justice stories to be told through Westminster’s growing collection of art.
We grew in exciting new ways.

We warmly welcomed 64 new members into the life and ministries of the church.

These wonderful people have begun to serve, teach, lead, sing, and grow in their faith in dynamic ways.

We learned a great deal in this first year about how to use our new spaces to expand our hospitality and Telling Presence in the City. Interest in rehearsing and performance at Westminster grew with the Star Tribune’s recognition of Westminster Hall as “best new classical music venue.”

“God is doing a new thing” was our theme for Adult Education, inspiring new Sunday morning classes, small groups, and Bible studies.

We watched with joy as our children and youth grew in their faith and commitment to making our world a better place. Summer Day Camp returned to Westminster, allowing children to experience life in the city, from a visit to a downtown high rise to a mock council meeting in the Mayor’s office to a ride on a city bus.
We built our community of faith through inspiring connections.

Fellowship, connection, and engagement grew in 2018, along with our new spaces. People who serve as greeters, ushers, Red Rovers, and reception desk volunteers, and others who help us with large events, learned our new spaces quickly and adapted to the move with patience and excitement.

Women’s Ministries continued to flourish, along with Men’s Ministries and WestConnect Young Adults. Participation grew across the board in retreats, Bible Studies, Great Gatherings, small groups, and events like Beyond Sunday Connections.
We put our faith into action.

Josie Johnson and Vice President Mondale shared their insights into racial justice at the most well-attended Social Justice Forum of the year. Mary Hess from Luther Seminary led important discussions on race entitled “Stumbling Our Way into Beloved Community,” and Race and Grace groups gathered afterwards to discuss what they learned. FEAST returned every fourth Sunday, with our congregation caring for the hungry in our midst.

We marched together in support of those who are experiencing homelessness and attended workshops to learn how to advocate as an expression of our faith. We hosted an eco-justice film series and an event with photographer Craig Blacklock and musician Peter Mayer. And we give thanks to God that our new onsite partner, St. David’s Harman Center, is serving nearly three dozen children daily who have experienced trauma or are at risk for out-of-home placement.

“Through mission trips, retreats, and service opportunities, our youth learn how to build meaningful relationships with others and get to see how God calls us to be peacemakers in the world.” Jim Cochrane, Youth Director

“We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to partner with Westminster in our effort to strengthen parent-child relationships and improve developmental outcomes in children who have faced significant adversity and trauma early in their lives. In our first ten months, 212 families have already benefitted.”

Julie Sjordal, St. David’s Center for Child & Family Development
We cared for one another and all in our midst.

With the opening of the new building, the Holy Spirit led us to start new ministries while sustaining our existing Congregational Care ministries.

In addition to the new Magnet Senior Center, we launched the New Old Adventure series to serve the spiritual and everyday needs of seniors, both in our congregation and our surrounding neighborhoods. Our deacon board continues its transition to care focus and has begun a new Pew Care team to connect with members and visitors in Sunday worship. We are also preparing to start the BeFriender Ministry to provide a caring and non-judgmental listening presence for our members.

Westminster Counseling Center moved into its generous new offices last April and added five therapists to better serve our community.

“The Magnet Senior Center provides a place where we can share ideas and laughter, a kind of place not always available to my age group. The Magnet gives seniors an opportunity they never would have on their own to build a community.”

Larry Chlebeck, Magnet Participant and WPC Member

“Westminster Town Hall Forum is the perfect expression of our church’s vision to be a “telling presence in the city.” Continuing a nearly 40-year tradition of engaging the community in reflection and dialogue on critical issues of our day, the Forum attracts future members and others to Westminster through its historical Town Hall Forum format and now through its companion program, TownTalks, which brings the same vision of community engagement to new audiences.”

Bill Linder-Scholer, Advisory Board Chair
We continued to give generously and joyfully.

Westminster is blessed with a spirit of generosity that has resulted in healthy financial growth for many years running, including 2018. Members answered God’s call to give generously and joyfully of time, talent, and resources. Three quarters of Westminster’s operating budget comes from congregational pledges and gifts, and more than one-quarter of the budget is dedicated to justice and mission.

In addition to supporting annual ministries and outreach, many members also became a part of the Legacy Circle through a planned gift in their will or estate plan. Their gifts help ensure that this community of faith will continue for generations to come.

This year’s theme of justice explored how God calls us to bring justice to our world. The congregation responded with overwhelming generosity as we chose to highlight how we strive for a just world in which all people thrive in every aspect of life.
Just as our building expanded so, too, did our staff, with the addition of Jim Cochrane as Director of Youth Ministries; Mahin Hamilton, Administrative Assistant for Educational Ministries; Angelique Kingsbury, Magnet Senior Center and Volunteer Coordinator; Déborah Majune, Accounting Clerk; David Ostenso Moore, Director of Music for Gathered at Five; Carol Torrens, Event Support Coordinator; Vanessa Uzong, Receptionist and Administrative Support for Faith in Action; and Amanda Weber, Interim Director of Choral Ministries.

Our Justice and Mission ministries also found new direction and support with the arrival of Rev. Alanna Simone Tyler as Associate Pastor, and we welcomed Rev. Matt Johnson into a new interim role with Families, Youth, and Children.

We bid farewell to Tesfa Wondemagegnehu, Director of Choral Ministries, who moved to St. Olaf College, and welcomed Dr. Amanda Weber to the position. Minister of Music and the Arts and organist Dr. Melanie Ohnstad announced she would be stepping down in May 2019.
A year of invitation ahead

*A Year of Learning* is the apt title of our first season in our newly expanded building. Now, as we look forward to 2019, we will transition into a *Year of Invitation*. What is God initiating in our midst? How can we take every opportunity to listen to our neighborhood in new ways?

This call will move us outwards and encourage us to think and act creatively. Westminster is changing and growing, as is the context in which we serve. Our *Year of Invitation* will bring new ideas and new rhythms to our life together, through worship, education, fellowship, and mission.